

Reducing the impact of partial school closures on disadvantaged pupils

This document covers:

- [Continuity of free school meals](#)
- [Catch up premium: allocation, spending and transparency](#)
- [A strategic approach to closing the disadvantaged gap](#)
- [Considering the pupil premium strategy](#)

We recommend reading the following NGA guidance and information alongside this document:

- [Remote education](#): information on safeguarding, expectations and monitoring
- [Monitoring priorities](#): the key areas of focus for governing boards
- You may also wish to consult our [frequently asked COVID-19 questions](#)

Despite the best efforts of schools to provide continuity of education for all pupils during partial school closure, disadvantaged pupils and their families will no doubt experience greater challenges than most of their peers. These challenges will, in many cases, restrict opportunities to engage in online learning as well as placing pressure on parents/carers to create a supportive learning environment within the confines of their home.

The government classifies a pupil as 'disadvantaged' if they have been eligible for free school meals in the last six years or if they have been in care or adopted from care. These are the children and young people we are considering in this document.

Continuity of free school meals

Whilst schools are closed to most pupils, governing boards should seek assurances that arrangements are in place for all eligible pupils to continue to receive free school meals. Department for Education (DfE) [guidance](#) sets out how schools can provide meals. This could include:

- providing lunch parcels through the school catering team or food provider
- providing vouchers for a local shop or supermarket
- using the DfE's national voucher scheme

Catch up funding

Following the spring 2020 lockdown, the government announced a £1 billion 'catch up premium' funding package which aims to tackle the impact of lost teaching time.

How much catch up premium funding will schools receive?

- catch up premium is allocated on a per-pupil basis
- mainstream schools will receive £80 per pupil (from reception up to year 11)
- special schools will receive £240 for each place
- schools will receive the funding in three tranches: autumn 2020, early 2021 and the summer term of 2021

How should catch up premium be spent?

- schools can spend their catch up premium in the way they consider most effective to help pupils catch-up for lost learning; this could include small group or one-to-one tuition
- the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has published [a guide to help schools spend their catch up funding effectively](#), which includes other strategies alongside small group tuition
- schools can use catch up premium to support remote education provision, for example purchasing additional devices or textbooks
- in addition, a £350 million National Tutoring Programme is being launched – schools will have access to subsidised tuition for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils aged 5 to 16 years

Monitoring catch up premium

The DfE have provided [information for schools](#) which further details catch up premium allocation and expectations. This guidance makes clear the expectation that governors and trustees scrutinise school plans to use funding in line with their specific catch up priorities.

Governing boards should also ensure appropriate transparency for parents. DfE guidance for [maintained schools](#) and [academies](#) sets out the requirement for schools to publish (on their website) details of how they intend to spend the funding and how they will assess its impact on attainment.

Access to technology

Access to devices and connectivity has been a challenge for many pupils and schools. The DfE is providing a range of support through its [‘get help with technology’ programme](#). This includes access to the internet, laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children in certain year groups.

Closing the disadvantaged gap: a strategic approach

Economic hardship and reduced time in school will have widened the gap which exists between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

As well as a systemic response and government funding, these complex issues require leadership and governance decision-making to support schools to close the attainment gap, and to provide access to the pastoral and mental health support needed by pupils who have suffered neglect, abuse, anxiety or bereavement during the pandemic.

Strategic discussions with senior executive leaders

Governing boards should discuss with school leaders how best to support disadvantaged pupils to regain the learning they have lost during the periods of partial closure.

Discussion should remain grounded in the established features of successful strategies for raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. These strategies, according to the [National Foundation for Educational Research](#), are: a whole school ethos of attainment for all, addressing behaviour and attendance, high quality teaching for all, meeting individual learning needs, deploying staff effectively, data driven and responding to evidence, and clear responsive leadership.

Governing boards should encourage their senior executive leader to give thought to:

- How the school/trust intends to reduce the impact of partial school closure on:
 - the achievement and progress of all pupils
 - how this is monitored and assessed (e.g. reliability of data)
 - the number of pupils who now count as disadvantaged
 - the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and the attainment gap
 - their barriers to learning (and not just those that are addressed by teaching and learning)
- The research, proven practice and local networks the school/trust can draw on to inform their approach to overcoming barriers to learning and achievement created or exacerbated by COVID-19.
- How to balance academic catch-up (pure teaching and learning) with the wider pastoral and family support needed to address circumstances that affect behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning.
- Which policies need to be reviewed, updated and aligned with the overall school/trust strategy in light of COVID-19. The Pupil Premium strategy (see below) will need to be rooted in the context of the times.
- The support and CPD that all staff (including school leaders) require to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils.
- The financial planning and resource implications of new/revised strategic priorities designed to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the disadvantage gap and the achievement and progress of all pupils.

Discussion of the above is unlikely to result in wholesale changes being made to the school/trust improvement plan or the governing board's strategy document, nor should it create an industry for school leaders in producing additional plans. More likely, it will result in governing boards and their senior executive leaders identifying the short-to-medium term objectives for recovering lost learning, and adjustments that are

needed to the longer-term objectives in order for them to have a sustainable impact (e.g. stakeholder engagement initiatives).

Considering the Pupil Premium strategy in the light of COVID-19

The Pupil Premium is additional funding given to schools to narrow attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. A [guide to Pupil Premium](#) is available for NGA members in our Knowledge Centre. It includes a section on monitoring the impact of the funding that the school/trust receives.

It's important that governing boards review the school/trust strategy (written by school staff) for using this funding in light of COVID-19 and seek assurances from their senior executive leader that the plan is still the right one targeted at the right pupils. It may be the case that the Pupil Premium funding received by the school/trust needs to be distributed in a different way that reflects the increase in social, emotional and health issues that impact upon pupils' learning.

Questions to ask

1. What do we know about options for catch-up education for disadvantaged pupils – what research is available?
2. What can we do to support our pupils to re-establish positive learning habits?
3. What about the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of our pupils?
4. How can we increase parental engagement?
5. How do we optimise the situation for all pupils and their learning?
6. How do we support and develop our staff to close the disadvantage gap?
7. What are the resource implications of focusing on new and/or different priorities – do we need to adjust our strategy for spending our Pupil Premium grant funding?

Further reading

- [Preventing the disadvantage gap from increasing during and after the Covid-19 pandemic](#) – a report published by the Education Policy Institute
- [Tackling the disadvantage gap during the COVID-19 crisis](#) – a briefing from the Children's Commissioner
- [Social mobility and COVID-19](#) – a report from the Sutton Trust

NGA's [GOLDline advice service](#) provides governing boards with independent and timely advice. Our expert team of advisers will respond to any question relating to the role and duties of governing boards and provide the advice that is needed to deliver effective governance in challenging circumstances.

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